scholarlypartnershipsedu

Volume 5
Issue 1 *Obama and Education -- Spring 2010*

Article 3

January 2010

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Introduction

Like many Americans, I found that the election of Barack Obama to presidency injected an energy into politics and everyday experiences that were matched by little else in the history of this great country. Personally, I bought into the popular view, what Grossman (1992) has labeled "affective investments." Here, collective and personal experience is reduced to the hype, hope, hyperbole, and expectation of the dominant views — that, quite simply put — because we have now elected a President of color, and no less an intellectual, historical order of the way business is done in EDUCATION will change. The hope was that, in part, we were obtaining leadership that was able to see through the contradictions of a system that claimed democratic virtue in the face of a competitive market logic, which reeked of community logic in the face of rampant individualism, and that placed diversity of experience as paramount to a one-size-fits-all mentality.

Reading Obama's two main books, *Dreams from MY Father* and *The Audacity of Hope,* I was struck by his intellectual fluidity — his ability to piece intellectual argument to paper. Perhaps more importantly, I emotionally responded to Obama's personal family history. Quite simply, it influenced me. I also come from parents from different countries — a father who was born in China from Russian parents and a mother who was born in Poland whose whole family was vanquished in the Holocaust. Now in the United States — with the above history in mind — to me, a President-elect promised an allegiance to an alternative politics, even immersed himself in difference and nonconformity to the status quo. I resonated. I admired. I lost myself in my history and connected that with the history of the President-elect. I am quite sure that I was not the only one who did this in diverse American communities!

Apart from immigrant commonalities to Obama, as dean of a College of Education with many years of leadership behind me, I also understood that while leadership looks different to different folk in various institutional hierarchies, we too have some common threads here. Whether it be politicing for position, dealing with institutionalized standards, or making tough calls, talking about leadership and doing it are two different animals. It's why in a past article of mine (Kanpol, 2002), entitled "Critical Leadership: Put Up or Shut Up," I called into question how leaders (in my case educational leaders in higher education) constantly struggle to walk the talk of

social justice in the face of institutional barriers[1]. Talking about "social justice" and doing it, so to speak, often find roads that do not merge. What I have realized in my own leadership style, or even philosophy over the years, is that oftentimes one's history, personal commitments, and philosophies can be compromised in the face of institutional hegemonies, such as a consumer market logic philosophy. After reading about Barack Obama's history and the attending critiques of his educational philosophies and practices by many academics, I am convinced that as educational leaders we all resonate with some of Obama's history as a leader — personal commitment in the face of harsh institutional realities. However, as leaders know, we can aid personal philosophy with choice of other leaders, the ability to challenge instantaneous perfection or a quick fix with the courage to challenge it (Batagiannis 2007), or quite simply, walking the gray lines of personal desires vs. institutional hegemony in order to affect change in a broad way, one connected to our field in education.

Most critiques I have read of Obama's educational philosophies and practices remain in the cynical mode . . . critique for the sake of critique, or bashing for the sake of bashing. Yes, I have played that game before . . . well over 20 years now, ever since I graduated with my doctorate. It is easy to critique as a way out of dealing with authentic change efforts. To be sure, it is less easy to offer hope out of despair or possibility out of cynicism, and view a glass that is half full rather than half empty. With the above in mind, this manuscript will (a) pit semblances of Obama's and my own personal link of self and history to educational philosophy and (b) view the contradiction of democratic hope in the face of institutional educational constraints. I then outline what I believe is a response to the conundrums I will deal with by (c) discussing the importance of what I will describe as a renewed public identity in the face of "corporate" hegemony. And finally, I will (d) reflect on my own leadership and link it instructively with the hope that perhaps one day, this article and other articles on Barack Obama can be read by others in institutional spheres of influence.

Self and Educational Philosophy: Historical Oppression vs. Growing up with Privilege

While I do not want to reduce one's self and experience to ultimate truth, it goes without saying that the historical construction of what Sharon Welch (1990) described as the "recollection of dangerous memories" can color how one views the world and ultimately help philosophical viewpoints. To be able not only to understand one's own place in the world in relation to the structure in which one has lived, but also to challenge various forms of oppression, subordination, and alienation, Welch argued that one would have to recollect one's own personal forms of these oppression to be able to at first put one's self into the shoes of another's oppression — or at least understand it as best as possible. With that knowledge gained, then one would have the ability to organize how to change oppressed experiences and/or structures.

Certainly, this is not the place to delve into every personal fact of the President's life that has been made public. His book *Dreams from my Father: A Story of Race and Inheritance* allows us many glimpses of Obama's complicated history and the construction of his historical beliefs. Certainly, we learn of the collection of his dangerous memories, the countries he lived in and the school systems he attended. While Obama's grandparents had been hailed as both "nigger lovers" and "dirty Yankees," they instilled a solid work ethic into his consciousness. My grandparents on my mother's side were obliterated by anti-Semitic hate. As late as the early 1970s I too would face the "dirty Jew" sing song by too many folk to count in Melbourne, Australia. Perhaps I resonate with Obama

[1]For this manuscript I will move broadly between using both university and public school sites as examples of the kinds of theoretical and practical dilemmas I will be discussing, particularly as related to the corporate model logic. A renewed public identity can and should be linked to both sites. I blur the boundaries of both these sites mainly because I see my work in the university and as dean as intimately linked to public schools, and the issues that arise concurrently quite similar.

in some important aspects: youthful exuberance and the willingness to suspend belief that discrimination was overt, like Obama, whose "father looked nothing like the people around me — that he was black as pitch, my mother white as milk — barely registered in my mind." While my grandparents spoke only Yiddish in Australia or broken English at best, I loved their commitment to maintaining their culture through their language and different ethnic food, as well as their sheer survival instincts as evidenced by their leaving Poland in a timely fashion, and their struggle to make ends meet in Australia — all, in my mind, to give their offspring a better life than they had experienced in war-torn Europe. What I didn't understand or register as a child growing up was the historical pain they must have felt at the discrimination they had experienced through the Hitler regime. The smiles on their faces at the traditional Passover dinners masked the dangerous memories constructed in their lives, as well as their past oppressive and shattering experiences.

I don't want to assume that the President's relationship to historical oppression through race and/or mixed marriages, of his white mother or black father and Indonesian stepfather, or that my own memories depicted above are similar; they are clearly different. Yet the commonality of dangerous memory has been handed down and publically written about by both Obama (2006) and myself (1999). On a personal level, I grew to understand about social injustices by experiencing them in the post-Holocaust era, in Australia through discrimination to Jewish boys (Kanpol, 1999). Obama, it seems, grew to appreciate the mixture of cultures in his own history, while aware of aspects of the historical discrimination of that particular history. Given his history, he profoundly comments on some of it as it pertains to his observations (2006):

> I have seen the desperation and disorder of the powerless; How it twists the lives of children on the streets of Jakarta or Nairobi as much the same way as it does the lives of children on Chicago's South Side. How narrow the path is for them between humiliation and untrammeled fury, how easily they slip into violence and despair (pp. x-xi).

With the above in mind, on the flip side of oppression are forms of privilege, both for myself and Obama. With grandparents willing to struggle so that their future investments (kids) would not experience similar oppressive forms of discrimination, our immediate parents put into motion forms of education that allowed social access. For me personally, though I dropped out of a private Jewish day school, my hard-working parents had the financial wherewithal to help pay for my future education when I was ready for it! From the roots of oppression as well, Obama's grandmother in particular instilled a hard-nosed work ethic into Obama that saw him eventually land at Harvard. What I have learned about privilege is that it is far easier to comment on social ills from a comfortable armchair and fireside than from the pit of despair in a poverty-stricken inner city, from the university classroom than from the steel mills, etc. Access to knowledge was a privilege, and both Obama and I in our own worlds had lots of it. One element of this struggle of the tightrope between discrimination and privilege, it seems, is summed up by Obama when he comments on the relationship between one's history and that implied social access and one's responsibility to it (2006):

> And what was a more interior, intimate effort on my part, to understand this struggle and to find my place in it, has converged with a broader public debate, a debate in which I am professionally engaged, one which will shape our lives and the lives of our children for many years to come (p. xi).

I resonate with Obama's historical roots, if only symbolically. The movement from the recollection of those dangerous memories to social entrée has certainly tainted my philosophy of education…let alone my philosophy of life. Such questions arise: If one believes in social justice, how can one seriously engage in changing forms of oppression when one is hegemonized into privilege? What role do I play in my place of employment given

the above conundrum, if at all? Is only lip service paid? Have we all been institutionally deceived into thinking about social justice but really enacting pure privilege? It is these questions that drive my next section relating Obama's democratic dialogue in the face of institutional constraints.

From the Family Roots to Theory and Real Practice: Riding the Contradiction of the Market Logic vs. Democratic Spaces

> I would agree that part of the hidden curriculum of the current structure and organization of education is bringing the marketplace, corporatization, and business into the university and into schooling (Margolios, 2001, p. 29)
>
> What is the task of educators at a time when the forces of democracy appear to be in retreat and the emerging ideologies and practices of militarization, corporatism, and political fundamentalism bear down on every aspect of individual and collective experience (Giroux, 2010, p. 232).

The above quotes, although a decade apart, bear weight to the kind of dilemma educators are constantly faced with: the hidden curriculum of market forces on the rise and their impeding our everyday activities, whether in universities or public schools. As Giroux (2010) constantly reminds us, there are no simple solutions to these dilemmas, other than to open up spaces for dialogue and critical thought.

With the above in mind, Obama's much-heralded visits to community events through town gatherings, his humanness as defined by his unique family history, his intellectual savvy, willingness to fight for healthcare for every American, etc., bode well for education reform and potential democratic practice, in theory anyway. However, the impending choice of Arne Duncan as secretary of education largely meant that Obama was to embrace and enhance the Bush administration's view of educational reform through high-stakes testing, increases in the militarization of public schools, and the decrease in parent and community control of schools (Kumashiro, 2009). This emphatically included far more testing (Ravitch, 2009), stricter accountability measures, and a larger investment of charter schools. Rewards for poorer school performers were to be given in a real financial sense with the states' fight for Race to the Top dollars, given for increased achievement. In Indiana, like many other states across the nation, school budgets have been viciously cut, good teachers and other school folk are losing their jobs. It is not surprising to at least surmise that the structural moves to cut budgets and job losses are linked to school districts' being forced to return to the basics to increase test scores and throw out anything not linked to increasing student and school achievement. In short, the hidden curriculum of a rigid and noncompromising testing philosophy has been used to once again deskill teachers by reducing them to what Giroux and Saltman (2010) describe as "mere technicians," where students are "reduced to customers in the market place rather than engaged, critical learners" (p. 1)

Perhaps more importantly, is the larger picture of the Obama and Duncan team, who talk a good democratic talk on the one hand, but let a market-driven mindset steer their philosophy on the other hand. On the one hand, Obama pursues the notions of what he defines as community charter schools, yet he does so within the language of increased "choice" and "competition" on the other (Obama, 2008). Walking the tight rope by rewarding teachers and schools with bonuses for performance on the one hand is pitted against Obama's critique of too much testing in the *No Child Left Behind* reform bill on the other hand. Simply put, Obama's view to increase testing and accountability for better achievement can be coupled with the economic views that tie the United States in a struggle to keep up with India and China, whose students are better educated and better equipped to be successful in what he describes as the "knowledge economy" (2008). The Nation at Risk reform is eerily echoed here, where increasing standards is connected to a competitive mindset

with international countries, thereby involving increased human investment in education within a capital economy. The link between education and the economy reeks in all of Obama's educational talks (2005, 2007, 2008). The above is colored by the Obama administration talk and subsequent action of making college more financially accessible and preparing students in general to be better and more critical thinkers.

It is quite clear now that Obama's election to office did not guarantee swift educational reform. In my most optimistic moments, I leaned towards Obama's history of oppression and understanding of the complexity of difference, and wondered if he could trade this off for current oppressive educational policy. What I learned was that choosing an African American President gave hope to many people of color, to the voices of the obscured, and to the intellectuals as well. I also both learned and hoped that progressive change had potential, that teacher unions were not shunned, and that the hope for audacity could rise. What I also learned was to ask these fundamental questions: Could Obama give up these tests, the rigid accountability that simply stifles and deskills teachers, the overt commitment to school choice, excessive competition, merit pay, etc.? Perhaps walking the line of the past administration educational policies and reinforcing them, while concurrently straddling the line of democratic talk through community engagement and difference seeking and acceptance is what Anyon (2005) describes as radical possibilities for education. Could Obama and his administration go there? Or could there be possible outlets to test these waters? It is to these answers that I lead to in the next sections.

Towards a Renewed Public Identity

In essence, Obama's presidency was a symbolic call for a renewed public identity. In my mind, a vision for a public identity has the potential to link personal history to subsequent action. Clearly, public identity calls for community action in the face of harsh economic times. At the heart of this renewed public identity, however, is the problematic marriage of a corporate school logic with its attendant testing practices and rigid accountability standards and economic race for dollar gain, against the backdrop belief and elation of racial tolerance, hope for a new potential with service to and for the public good spearheading new and invigorating prospects. This, among other things, is what Obama's administration, with its figurehead President, elevated many to dream about.

Despite the hope that "yes, we can" language Obama used in his campaign brings to the people, and my own leadership position at the university, the university and public school public identities mirror that of the corporate models described above. Judgment is, for the most part, based on the ideological notion of individualism — basing one's worth on specific accomplishments. Here, in my workplace for instance, tenure and promotion is largely defined by numbers of publications, graded teacher evaluations, or on dollar grant acquisitions. While I don't want to underplay the importance of establishing a personal professional identity in the academy, it seems that lost within the above ideological logic of individualism is the language of the public good, selfless work that is not often rewarded for folk who give timeless hours to their communities. Also, within university structures, while the language of public good and even social justice is mentioned on occasion, particularly in the colleges of arts and sciences as well as schools of education and fine arts, more credence is given to class size, credit hours generated, and retention rates rather than perhaps what the universities are more centrally supposed to be about. And that is, helping change communities for the public good, and this despite the structural importance of size, dollars, and credit hours just mentioned. Put differently, I personally do not buy one bit into the argument that simply making dollars, acquiring more grants, growing a student body, or increasing retention rates is a movement away from a corporate model, unless it is linked intimately to the quality of life in the community that these numbers could represent.

With the above in mind, a renewed public identity in the education realm, whether at universities or public

schools, means more than the establishment of what Giroux (1988) coined as educating potential teachers and/or citizens to become "transformative intellectuals," those committed to challenging oppressive school structures through action and critical understanding of when to act. A renewed public identity is about the ability to imagine social justice and build what Cornel West (1993) describes as prophetic public intellectualism. Here, one's personal history is linked to informed decision making, where transcending the contradiction of corporate logic and democratic and community struggle and activism requires the courage (Batagiannis, 2007) to act audaciously. In other words, it would not be THE AUDACITY OF HOPE that Obama calls for, but what I am calling the HOPE FOR AUDACITY. Perhaps, in my world, this is a movement to know not only when to act, but how to act as well. Indeed this may mean the dialogue of how to transcend publication numbers as a dominant form of evaluation and view community action as a viable means for judgment, or in the public school sense, to know that Title I schools could be doing an incredible job with their students despite the low achievement numbers on standardized test scores. It may also mean looking at grant work and seeing how it is linked to the public good. It could also mean looking at professional development schools as linked to community growth, not simply as delivery of goods and services between universities and public schools, such as simply marking off the number of in-services schools conduct, etc. It seems to me that the ideological individualism line would be challenged by what I will label as a "collectivism of the future." This collectivism, whether in the university community or public school community will base decisions that are not top down as in a corporate model. Given that I am a dean of a College of Education, I also know that decisions sometimes must be made top down, if not just for practical purposes. Yet, a public intellectualism needs to broaden or have the potential to broaden the participation of citizens in choices. The top down model must be challenged for not only the public good, but also the health and well being of the participating citizens in the community. Such public discussion as, "valuing individualism but not being a slave to its philosophy," could guide healthy dialogue at all levels. Clearly, Obama's conundrum, not too dissimilar to mine, one that links history of experience of difference to public good, can get seriously compromised within a corporate mindset. The audacity and courage to challenge the ideological lines of the corporate model logic need community support and a prophetic vision that looks at timeless values such as selflessness, dignity, courage, and grace as guiding motifs for subsequent evaluation and community growth. Those interested in struggling through the contradictions mentioned in this manuscript certainly have work to do. In my conclusion I outline some of the areas that may need investigating as we move forward to a renewed public identity.

Conclusion: Some Practical Questions and Concerns

In thinking about how a collective public identity relates pragmatically, certain practical issues come to mind. I first think about how colleges and schools of education are forced to link their work to accountability standards, both internally through accreditation agencies and externally to public schools, and their struggle with institutional deskilling. Most recently at Indiana University–Purdue University Fort Wayne (IPFW) a group of faculty completed a collective volume on the accreditation process (Swim et al., 2010). The struggle to talk beyond a corporate logic and above standardization and meaningfully engage in discussion resulting from our book, meant dealing with historical issues of the workforce, gender concerns, deskilling vs. reskilling processes, etc. In thinking beyond corporatism, I believe that we have to view a renewed vision of field placements, ones that are not simply technical assignments, but are connected to service learning in the community in which one is placed. Perhaps that means viewing students as a part of a two- to four-year placement, nestling themselves into a community, serving selflessly as they gain their credential. Community work, service, and understanding

and involvement override individual gain or a corporate logic, even though that logic is already embedded into school structures at the local, state, and federal levels. On a curricular level, schools of education cannot continue to acknowledge themselves as simply "professional schools" if they want to make inroads into the community. Linking schools of education with social causes — prisons, health institutions, environmental issues, and many more — means broadening the scope of the role of schools of education as simply preparing teachers for the workforce in limited methodological and quick ways. Clearly, it seems, a renewed public collective identity challenges the linear role of schools of education and requires internal discussion on how to do so.

At a local university level, I would like to see how a corporate promotion and tenure philosophy is challenged and therefore broadened to include the public good as a qualitative and revered item for consideration. Or perhaps linking publication to community impact needs to be seriously investigated. For instance, a particular faculty may have written only one or two seminal articles, but perhaps their work impacted communities in far larger ways than the faculty who has written 30 published articles! Taking this logic further, how grant acquisition affects the public becomes paramount and equal to or stronger than the sum of the grant itself. Or how retention rates increase as a result of community growth needs to be viewed and researched, rather than simply the collection of retention rates as a marker for a university's funding equation! Even still, how faculty simply use their time locally to aid community rather than use time as an individualistic logic to simply advance careers needs to be viewed with a new lens as how to adjudicate faculty production.

It seems to me that a renewed community and collective public identity needs to also view how one's personal voice interacts with the community. The concept of "voice" refers to the subjective element of the self[2]. Here, how one's personal history, or simply put, one's "dangerous memories," play out in a professional way needs to be deepened so that individualism can be challenged and transformed into community action. On a personal level, I am clearly a culprit in the system. I too have been hegemonized into a corporate logic that has valued worth more on achievement that on public renewal. What I don't want to underplay in any professional career is that achievement. Yet, I also know that with the corporate mentality so reared at present, unless we take action to counter it, we may also fall prey to President Obama's powerful lingo, where it seems, at least in the educational sense, that we can get caught up in the President's eloquence at the expense of authentic challenges to the logic and subsequent ideology that has really supported it. To reiterate, our President has supported the kind of rigid testing and accountability frameworks that I and others have connected to a broader corporate-like and market mentality. He has also provided hope to challenge this consciousness by engaging the nation in the hopeful possibilities that community and service could still win the day. However, it is the former ideology that has swayed far more firmly in practice. I do think our community of educators have to move beyond critique and into action plans, some of which I have mentioned in this manuscript. Clearly, there is plenty of think tank and practical work needed that should be accomplished to view and eventually alter ideological structures in order to operate in new and enlightening ways. I firmly believe we have no choice but to do so, for the current logic is crippling our collective identity and creativity. Yes, we can!

[2]For more on the concept of voice, see Kanpol (1999).

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